

DOES ANTHROPOLOGY NEED MUSEUMS?

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You can be a museum, or you can be modern, but you can't be both.—Gertrude Stein (refusing to leave her collection to the Museum of Modern Art).

Rien ne me paraît ressembler autant à un bordel qu'un musée. On y trouve le même côté louche et le même côté pétrifié. . . . Dans l'un et l'autre endroit on est, d'une certaine manière, sous le signe de l'archéologie; et si j'ai aimé longtemps le bordel c'est parce qu'il participe lui aussi de l'antiquité, en raison de son côté marché d'esclaves, prostitution rituelle.—Michel Leiris, Chargé de Département d'Afrique Noire, Musée de l'Homme (1939: 41).

Museum anthropologists often bewail the present state of anthropology in museums, not infrequently blaming this on a wrong turning taken by some of the most prestigious areas of anthropology a few decades ago. If only the leaders of our field could be brought to recognize their mistakes, they would again send their students to museums and the Golden Age might return—so the argument runs. The principal part of this paper is an attempt to summarize the objective facts about the relations between museums and the mainstream of anthropology in the past and at present, trying to strike a balance between the bias of non-museum anthropologists who tend to overlook the role of museums (especially in the past) and the bias of museum anthropologists who tend to exaggerate the importance of museums (especially in the present). Recognition of the objective situation is, I believe, a necessary prerequisite to policy decisions and to attempts at reformation. It is especially necessary for museum anthropologists and museum administrators, whatever their wishes for the present and hopes for the future, to admit the minuscule role and the low prestige of museum work in present-day ethnology. Of course

I believe that I am also correct in the value judgments I make about the present situation and in the suggestions I present for plans for the future. But I realize that these sections of the paper may be considered controversial, and the reader should evaluate the two parts of the paper separately.

If we adopt for a moment the usual, historically naive, *ex post facto* outlook on the history of science, the beginnings of anthropological collecting can be traced even before Aristotle and Classical Greece. There is much archeological evidence for the collecting of what would today be anthropological specimens in prehistoric times—exotic objects and heirlooms have been valued for almost as long as we have any evidence at all on human culture. In more recent times, parallels to anthropological collections, and forerunners of them, can be seen in collections of military trophies, in holy relics and the offerings of the faithful kept in Greek and Roman temples and medieval European churches, and in the powdered mummies, unicorn horns, and other magico-medical items collected by early European physicians and pharmacists. However, these collections served motives and functions different from those of modern museums. Collections of curiosities and archeological specimens formed by the Chinese gentry and royalty in the 12th century provide closer functional parallels to modern anthropological collections (W. Trousdale, pers. communic., 9 Dec. 1968), but these are outside the historical tradition from which modern anthropology and modern Western museums developed.

The real institutional beginnings of modern museums lie in the Cabinets of Curiosities which came into vogue soon after 1500 A.D. (Murray 1904; Hodgen 1964: 114–23). The surviving catalogues and descriptions of these Cabinets show that anthropological specimens formed a very important part of them: many of the “artificial curiosities” (as opposed to the “natural curiosities”) they contained would today be classified as anthropological, and the pieces in modern anthropological collections which have the longest histories of continuous preservation in collections are a few items which entered Cabinets of Curiosities in the early 16th century, such as some

Mexican pieces sent back to Europe by Cortez after the conquest of Mexico in 1519 which survive in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna (Nowotny 1960).

Cabinets of Curiosities were important for the early development of geology, biology, and archeology. The concept of "archeological ages as technological stages" grew in large part from the typological classifications of archeological artifacts in Cabinets of Curiosities and in the first museums; the earlier recognition of the typological similarity between stone weapons collected among contemporary North American Indians and the "thunder stones" of European archeology provided an early impetus to the notion of cultural evolution. But these Cabinets were of practically no significance for the development of ethnology, which grew instead out of written collections of customs—compendia from travellers' accounts and from classical literature of such things as religious customs and marriage customs—a different kind of collecting, which began at about the same time as Cabinets of Curiosities but independent of them (Hodgen 1964: 123–206). There were no efforts to compile systematic published accounts of the ethnological objects in Cabinets of Curiosities, and very little attention was devoted to developing logical classifications of these specimens (there were of course published catalogues, and published collections of such lists, but these show little or no effort to develop logical or any other classifications of ethnological objects [Klemm 1837 contains a useful description and bibliography]).

The beginnings of true anthropological collections in museums, the separation of these collections from other natural historical and historical collections into distinct museum departments of anthropology and into independent anthropological museums, date from around 1840.¹ This was also the period

¹ The precise dates usually given are often in fact rather arbitrary, for the older museums evolved slowly by the amalgamation and subdivision of previous collections, becoming distinct and public by a series of steps. However, the Ethnographical Museum in Leningrad was established in 1836 (Troufanoff 1966: 232), the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, dates itself from 1837 (Anonymous 1962: 3), and the founding of the Ethnographical Collection of the National Museum of Denmark can be dated 1841 or 1849 (Birket-Smith 1968: 34–35). Frese (1960: 10) gives a summary chart of the founding dates of European and North American anthropological museums (but the source of his data does not always distinguish the founding dates of anthropology sections from those of the superordinate museum or museum organization).

of the beginnings of modern anthropology with its emphasis on the central importance of field research by the anthropologist himself. The founding dates of the earliest professional societies of anthropologists fall into the same period (*Société ethnologique de Paris*, 1838; American Ethnological Society, 1842; Ethnological Society of London, 1843).

What can be called the Museum Period of anthropology runs from the 1840's to about 1890.² During this time there was no university training in anthropology, so anthropologists were all people originally trained in other fields. Almost all anthropological research was done by museum anthropologists, or by amateurs, or by some other mavericks whose university teaching responsibilities lay in other fields. Physical anthropology was still largely a branch of human anatomy rather than a part of anthropology, and most of its practitioners were associated with medical schools. A nearly unique exception was the Bureau of American Ethnology, which was founded in 1879 and continued as a separate branch of the Smithsonian, administratively independent from the U. S. National Museum (despite the inauguration in 1883 of a Department of Anthropology in the Museum). The staff of the B.A.E. conducted the most extensive and the most important anthropological research in the United States during the last decade of the Museum Period and the first decade or two of the ensuing period. The gathering of museum collections during fieldwork, and studying them later on in the museum, was however an important and respectable part of anthropological research during this Museum Period. The emphasis was on classification and typologies and geographical distributions. But museum collections were only marginally related to the development of theories of cultural evolution, which was the main focus of interest of anthropology during this period. At the beginning, and in the prehistory of anthropology, typological studies of artifacts (both archeological and ethnological) were important for the development of ev-

² This periodization—Museum Period 1840–1890, Museum-University Period 1890–1920, University Period 1920 to date—is developed from that implied by Collier and Tschopik (1954). While it reflects primarily the United States situation, a similar sequence obtains in other parts of the world. The second period probably began two or three decades earlier in France and Germany, and lasted three or four decades longer there and elsewhere in Europe.

olutionary theories—and also for the initial developments in the now-discredited German “culture-historical” school. But interest soon shifted to social evolution, and a good deal of the most important anthropological work done during this period had no relation to museum collections and could have been conducted equally well if they had not existed at all: research on kinship terminology, on the forms of marriage and the family, on religion, has never depended at all on museum collections. Figure 1 shows that in the major German, British, and American journals the proportion of ethnological articles which made any reference to museum collections never rose above 20 percent during this period.

The next historical period of anthropology ran from about 1890 to about 1920. We can call this the Museum-University Period. The formal teaching of anthropology in universities began in the 1880's and 1890's in both England and the United States, and in France, Germany, and the Netherlands rather earlier (Quatrefages was appointed to a Chair of [Physical] Anthropology at Paris in 1855 while Chairs in the Ecole d'Anthropologie were inaugurated in 1875; Bastian was made Dozent für Ethnologie in Berlin in 1867; future administrators for the Dutch East Indies received anthropological training from 1870). Still nearly all the jobs were in museums, most of the teaching was done by anthropologists who also had museum appointments, and museums supported most of the field work. Museum collections remained important for research—in fact, they became perhaps even more important, for the theoretical developments of this period often used museum collections as evidence, on such questions as the relative importance of diffusion as opposed to independent invention, the relation between cultures and their natural environments, and in the applications of concepts from biology in developing the notions of culture-areas and the age-area techniques of pseudo-historical reconstruction. The Bureau of American Ethnology continued to serve in effect as the research arm of Smithsonian anthropology; its collections were curated in the separate Department of Anthropology of the U. S. National Museum, while much of the publication and some of the fieldwork of the few anthropologists in the Museum was supported by the B.A.E.

In New York a somewhat similar relationship was worked out by Franz Boas, the founder of academic anthropology in the United States: between 1895 and 1905 he held a joint appointment in the American Museum of Natural History and at Columbia University, and used the museum as a base for his own and his students' fieldwork and its financing, from which museum collections resulted.

Yet the importance of museum collections for the anthropology of this time should not be exaggerated. The chart (Fig. 1) shows that in ethnology in the United States there was a steady decline in their importance from a peak at 1900; the situation in Great Britain and Germany is less clear, but here too such collections were never the major focus of research. This was the period of the rapid growth of fieldwork as the *sine qua non* of ethnological research, and the collecting and study of material objects played a relatively minor role in this fieldwork. In archeology, too, such important developments of this period as the application of the stratigraphic method were not derived from work with museum collections as such.

In 1905 Boas resigned from the American Museum of Natural History in a conflict over the emphasis to be given research; similar difficulties damaged anthropology in the University Museum in Philadelphia somewhat later. Darnell (1968) has described these difficulties as conflicts between the increasing professionalization of anthropology and the growth of teaching departments with interests beyond material culture, on the one hand, and the focus of museums (and museum administrators and trustees) on objects, their collecting, care, and exhibit, on the other hand. Beginning about 1920 we can speak of the University Period of anthropology, which continues up to the present. With the gradual increase in university teaching of anthropology, the balance shifted until the majority of anthropologists was not employed in museums. The proportion of museum anthropologists has been steadily declining, particularly rapidly during the last 20 years with the really explosive growth of college and university enrollments in anthropology courses. Universities and foundations took over the support of most fieldwork.

A measure of the relative importance for ethnology of mu-

seum collections, and of material objects whether or not in museums, is the proportion of papers which touch on these topics in the leading journals in the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany (Fig. 1).³ By this measure interest in objects in American ethnology declined even more sharply beginning in 1920 than it had before. In France, the decline did not begin until the following decade—perhaps additional evidence of the marginality of many aspects of French anthropology until after World War II which has recently been noted by a French historian of the field (Mercier 1966: 104). The corresponding decline in Great Britain did not begin until 1940; this is a surprising difference between British and American anthropology, which may indicate that the school of “social anthropology” which came to dominate British anthropology beginning about 1930 and soon had marked influences on ethnology in the United States and elsewhere, was less antagonistic to studies of material objects than is usually supposed (e.g. by Hutton 1944, Collier 1962)—or perhaps the dominance was real but was inadequately represented by the editorial practices of the journal examined. The German curves are of very little significance for nearly 30 years following 1930; German anthropology has only recently begun to recover from the damage done to it by the Nazis.

This brings us to the present, where anthropology is in the situation of having the responsibility for huge and irreplaceable collections which represent a large investment over many years of time, thought, care, and money, but seemingly have very little importance for current anthropological research, especially ethnological research. During the last 15 years, North American anthropologists have published at least 10 papers deploring the situation of museum anthropology (actually ethnology) (Collier and Tschopik 1954; Shapiro 1958; Fenton 1960; Mason 1960; Collier 1962; Collier and Fenton 1965; Borhgyi 1965; Sturtevant 1966; Dockstader 1967; McFeat 1967);

³ For each country the journal examined is the main vehicle of publication for papers on ethnology without restrictions as to the geographical area or sub-topic treated. The definition of ethnology applied in the counts is the one implied by an exhaustive partition of anthropology into ethnology, archeology, linguistics, and physical anthropology. Abstracts, notices of meetings, book reviews, letters, and similar brief communications, and papers on non-ethnological topics, were not counted.

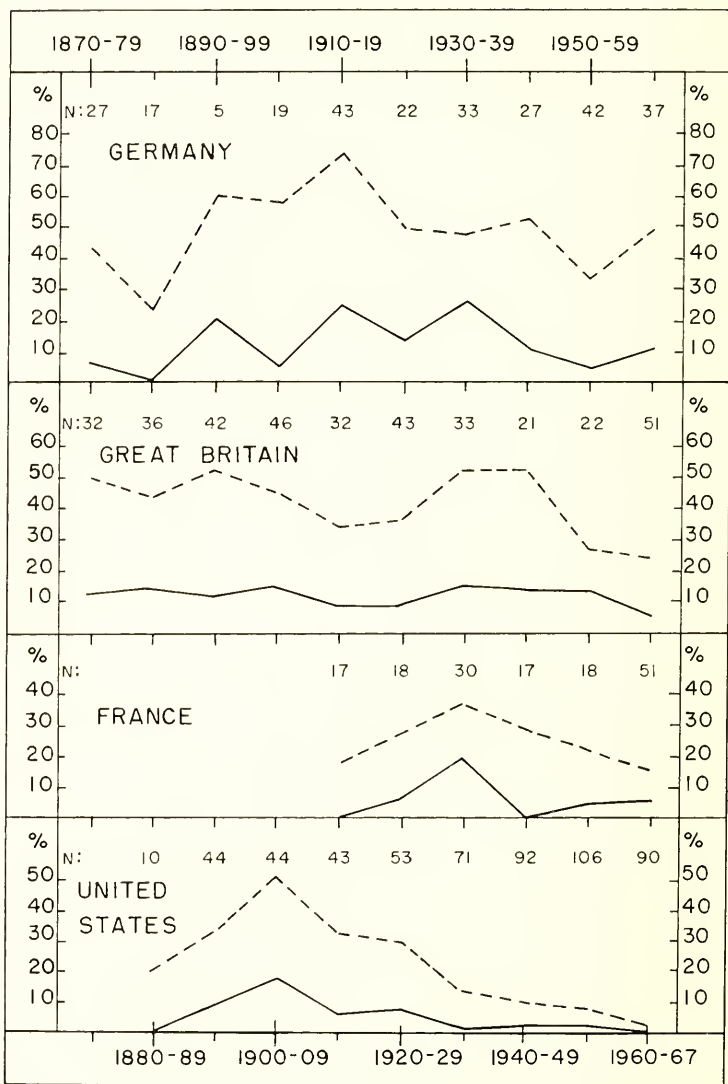


FIGURE 1. Interest in Material Culture and Museum Collections in Ethnology. Dashed lines show the percentage of all papers on ethnology which are concerned (at least in part) with material culture; solid lines show the percentage of all papers on ethnology which are based (at least in part) on museum collections. Sources: *American Anthropologist* (1888-1967); *l'Ethnographie* (1913-1965) and *l'Homme* (1964, 1967);

the most extensive treatment of this and related problems is a monograph by a Dutch anthropologist (Frese 1960). I know of no British, French, Scandinavian, or German papers which parallel these (although they may exist), but conversations with museum anthropologists from these countries over the last year or two have convinced me that the situation is not very different in Europe.

Although it is customary to write about "anthropology" and museums, in fact some distinctions between the sub-fields of anthropology must be drawn before a sensible answer can be given to the question posed at the head of this paper. Anthropology is quite sharply divided into four sub-fields, and one of the most marked differences between them is the use they make of museum collections. These four sub-divisions are linguistics, physical anthropology, archeology, and ethnology.⁴

The relation between linguistics, the scientific study of language, and the usual museum anthropological specimens, is nil. This is true of anthropological linguistics, which is based on the field study of languages which are still spoken and to a lesser extent on written records of them made in relatively recent times. The U. S. National Museum is perhaps unique among museums in including in its collections extensive linguistic archival materials useful for anthropological linguists. Those linguists who study extinct languages known only or largely through documents recovered archeologically—for example

⁴This represents more or less standard American usage, except that (for good reasons) I prefer the somewhat old-fashioned and museum-oriented label "ethnology" for what is often now called "cultural anthropology" or "social and cultural anthropology." In Europe these four fields (and folklore) are less often viewed as components of a single larger discipline. Tendencies in Europe towards integrating the fields and in America towards incorporating into anthropology studies of Euro-American cultures have as yet had little effect on the organization of museums, whose buildings, collections, and bureaucracies cause them to lag behind universities in the reorganization, amalgamation, and subdivision of traditional departments.

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Journal of the (Royal) Anthropological Institute (1872–1964) and *Man* N.S. (1967); *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* (1871–1967). Every third volume of each journal was scored (with some adjustments for France during W.W. I and Germany during W.W. II); these scores were then lumped by decade. N = number of papers on all ethnological topics in that decade's sample.

Mesopotamian clay tablets or Egyptian inscriptions or papyri—are not anthropological linguists and the museum specimens they study are only rarely kept in anthropological museum collections.

Physical anthropology deals with human biology. Thirty and more years ago, osteometry based on museum collections was a major interest of the field (although anthropometry of the living was also important). In recent years sub-specialties such as human genetics and primate ethology which have little or nothing to do with museum collections have been growing, and classical osteometry and anthropometry have nearly disappeared. Research on human paleontology, paleodemography, and paleopathology still depends on skeletal material, but the older museum collections are often of little value (especially for demographic studies) because they rarely constitute proper samples of the ancient populations. Present research concentrates on newly excavated materials, and the new necessity to keep even fragmentary specimens sometimes poses storage and cataloguing problems.

An indication of the relation of museum collections to research is the proportion of new accessions which come in without specific data on their sources. Practically no such specimens are now accepted into the physical anthropology collections in the U. S. National Museum; bones not accompanied by precise information as to their spatial and temporal provenience are not worth accepting and preserving, because they cannot be used for research.

Specialists in physical anthropology are a small minority of the total number of anthropologists, and very few museums maintain collections in this area. It is, however, becoming difficult to find properly qualified curators for these collections since the research of most physical anthropologists no longer depends on museum specimens.

Archeology, which is the study of fossil cultures, of cultural evidence recovered largely through excavations, is the part of anthropology for which museum collections are most important. The whole subject rests directly on the study of material objects and material remains, used as evidence for deductions regarding the human past. Of course the purpose of research is

not the simple amassing of museum specimens—an activity which archeologists call “pot hunting” and consider to be mere vandalism. Rather, advances come through new fieldwork, new methods of observing, recording, and interpreting, and the publication of these results. However, most archeologists consider that a major part of their responsibilities for documenting their results consists in providing a properly catalogued museum collection, because publication alone does not provide adequate data for future research, which must continually check back with previously excavated specimens in order to set the new work into context and in order to reinterpret the old results in terms of new typologies and new descriptive techniques. Archeology thus has an important “taxonomic” base in museum collections, much like some of the natural sciences.

As with physical anthropology, undocumented specimens are normally not accepted into museum collections. In recent years well over 90 percent of the archeological specimens added to the U. S. National Museum collections have come from excavations by professional archeologists. Furthermore, archeologists have little hesitation in deciding what parts of their field collections should be kept in the museum collections and what parts can be discarded after they have been recorded. Hind-sight sometimes shows that mistakes have been made, but the central position of material objects in the research means that at a given period there is good agreement on what must be kept for documentation.

Even though most current research depends on new field studies, there remain many important museum collections resulting from older excavations which have never been adequately studied. The occasional archeologist who analyzes and publishes these old collections is not felt by his peers to be wasting his time, and such studies can be expected to increase with the rapid destruction of archeological sites in many parts of the world in the construction of dams, highways, and industrial plants, the expansion of cities, and the increasing use of earth-moving machinery in agriculture. Much of Classical archeology already depends on the study of existing museum specimens, often with inadequate contextual data (this is one of the respects in which this field is peripheral to, or outside,

anthropological archeology). On the other hand archeologists working in some parts of the world are forced to do without museum collections because they are prohibited from exporting their excavated materials while local museums are still unable to preserve them for future research.

Ethnology, the fourth sub-field of anthropology, is the study of living cultures, especially by means of the sort of fieldwork known as ethnography, which requires participant observation (extended periods of face-to-face relations with members of the society being studied, observations and interviews conducted on the spot by the ethnologist himself). A minor strand in ethnology makes use of contemporary written documents about now-extinct societies or the past stages of existing societies, but this "ethnohistory" depends heavily on methods developed by ethnographic fieldwork.

Ethnology is today the central field of anthropology, the one which holds together the four sub-fields. Anthropological linguistics, archeology, and physical anthropology are parts of anthropology largely by virtue of their interrelations with ethnology, and particularly because of the central position held by the (ethnological) concept of culture in definitions of the coverage and the methodological and theoretical emphases of the non-ethnological sub-fields. There are some kinds of linguistics, archeology (or prehistory), and human biology which are non-anthropological in terms of the methods, interests, training, and professional self-identification of their practitioners, while there are no professional ethnologists who are not anthropologists in this sense. This formulation—which is probably acceptable to most non-ethnologist anthropologists, at least in North America—does not deny the fact that linguistics, archeology, and physical anthropology have varied relations between each other and with disciplines outside anthropology. For example, archeology is more closely dependent on several of the natural and physical sciences than is ethnology, and in turn can contribute to their historical aspects in ways that ethnology cannot. It is also true that many of the interests and methods of ethnology depend on contributions from the other fields of anthropology, and from other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, economics, and history. But anthropology remains a

single subject, with sub-divisions. Some observers believe that it will not (and sometimes that it should not) remain so, that increasing specialization will lead to fragmentation. But this specialization often overlaps sub-field boundaries, so that the discipline may well become a network rather than a rigid set of four pigeonholes. I believe that the sub-fields will (and should) continue to offer more to each other than to outside disciplines. If museums need anthropology, they must include ethnology.

But ethnology is the anthropological sub-field which has the most ambiguous relation to museum collections. Ethnologists study culture, and they often boast that, in contrast to practitioners of the other social sciences and humanities, they study both all cultures and all aspects of culture. A classification of the aspects of culture useful for present purposes is a common one which distinguishes three major classes: material culture, social culture, and mental culture. To characterize these roughly, material culture is concrete artifacts or manufactures, social culture is behavior, and mental culture is ideas, knowledge, and beliefs.⁵ Only material culture can be represented in museum collections, and it is perfectly possible—indeed it is usual—to study social and mental culture without paying any attention to material culture, to artifacts, and therefore to museum collections. Material culture studies themselves are of course not limited to work with museum collections, for the contexts of the objects in the social and cognitive systems of their makers and users is a primary interest.

As with the other sciences represented in natural history museums, collections are relevant to only some kinds of anthropology and often not to those areas in "the forefront of research" (cf. Crompton 1968). But there is a significant difference: for the core area of anthropology, "systematics" and "basic descriptions" based on or documented by museum collections are

⁵ See Osgood 1951 for these categories, defined on a somewhat different basis. The definition which I prefer for both theoretical and methodological reasons puts the locus of "culture" in the minds of its bearers, which makes the term "mental culture" redundant and requires rewording of the labels for the material and social results of culture: perhaps "cultural materials" (i.e. artifacts) and "cultural behavior." If artifacts are thus viewed as reflections of culture rather than part of culture, they are of no less value as documents or evidence on a major aspect of culture, on the varieties of specifically human cognition and behavior.

not now and have never been fundamental in any sense to other research. Artifacts and museum collections of them play no role as ethnological "standards" or "vouchers"; the units of ethnological study are bounded, identified, and classified without regard for museum collections. This would not be important for museum anthropology if ethnologists were really equally interested in all aspects of culture. But as has already been indicated, this is not the case. From the beginning, research on material culture has been less important in ethnology than research on social and mental culture.

In 1967 the three major general anthropological journals in the United States, England, and France published 65 papers on ethnological topics. Of these, only five dealt with material culture; among even these, three were based on field observations and made no reference to museum collections. The overwhelming majority—60 to 63 out of 65—could have been written if there were no anthropological museum collections at all. Even the research of most museum ethnologists does not involve material culture or museum specimens. Most modern ethnologists have never studied museum specimens, have never collected for a museum, have never even been in a museum storage area. Yet I suppose at least 90 percent of museum ethnological specimens have never been studied.

In a few decades, anthropologists will surely look back on the present time as the last period when it was possible to collect hand-made traditional artifacts, and to document their production, local terminology, and uses by field studies, before they were completely replaced by mass-produced manufactured goods of the "international style." Nearly every ethnographer could collect now; hardly anyone does. No anthropological museum seems able and willing to provide funds to encourage collecting by the hundreds of ethnographic field researchers now at work. The budgets of most museum anthropology departments do not regularly include sufficient funds to purchase even the useful collections which are offered. When funds are available, high prices tend to go for showy pieces without documentation bought on the art market. If items collected by a trained ethnographer with proper scientific documentation can be bought, the price paid normally covers only

the actual costs of purchasing, packing, and shipping the specimens. Yet there are many ethnographers (especially outside the United States) who lack sufficient funds to support their own fieldwork and who would readily devote some extra time and attention to making a properly documented collection if they were offered a reasonable mark-up over their out-of-pocket expenses, which could be used to help pay for their other work.

As recently as ten years ago, an ethnologist on the British Museum staff wrote that in the United Kingdom, "collecting in the field is rarely possible for most museum officials in charge of ethnographical collections" (Cranstone 1958: 7), and the situation has changed little since then. In the United States and a few other countries funds are not so short and the policies of large museums regarding fieldwork by their staffs are not so restrictive. Yet over the last four years, nearly two-thirds of the specimens added to the ethnological collections in the U. S. National Museum were not collected by ethnologists, but were collected under non-scientific conditions by untrained people and hence lack essential documentation as to provenience, age, functions, and so forth. Of course non-anthropologists can collect materials which are scientifically useful. However, a set of directions and suggestions on how to make an adequate field collection of ethnographic specimens which the U. S. National Museum published in 1967 was the first such guide published in English since 1902; the last one in French is dated 1931 and the last in German, 1914 (Sturtevant 1967; Holmes and Mason 1902; Musée d'Ethnographie 1931; Ankermann 1914).

The relative unimportance of collections is demonstrated by the growing tendency to separate them from the associated scientific staff, public exhibits, museum administrative space, and classrooms. The more convenient centrally located space is repeatedly being found to be too valuable to use for storing specimens. But if the specimens were really significant for research, it would be as inconceivable as it is for research libraries to locate them several miles away from the researchers (usually without plans for a regular service to transport people and objects between the two locations). What is objectionable

is not the separation of the collections from the exhibits, but storing the specimens miles away from the associated records and the scientific staff.⁶

As Crompton (1968), Washburn (1967, 1968), and others have pointed out, when research on collections is infrequent and of low prestige museums naturally seek other justifications for existence—popular exhibits, general education—and the staff members tend to become administrators, showmen and public relations experts, and museologists, rather than subject-matter specialists. The results for research on the collections and even for their preservation are obviously disastrous; that this is not hypothetical can be seen from the history of many museums (see, e.g., the cases described in Whitehill 1967). Anthropological collections are even more liable than some others to suffer, for many kinds of anthropological specimens require constant attention to prevent deterioration, many are of high value on the art market, and research on them is at a particularly low ebb. Some recent examples of the results are pertinent: a naturalist in charge of a museum overrides his anthropologist curators and authorizes the loan of important ethnological specimens for decorating politicians' offices; an ethnologist museum director sells unique ethnographic specimens catalogued in his museum, both at the public sales desk at his institution's front door and through profit-making dealers in "primitive art"; one archeologist museum director trades important well-documented early ethnographic specimens from his museum to a private individual in exchange for an easily duplicated collection of non-excavated archeological sherds; another archeologist in charge of a museum orders each of his curators to select specimens for sale at a private auction to his socialite "friends of the museum"; one major anthropological museum charges visiting researchers \$50 to open an exhibit case in order that displayed specimens may be studied; an ethnologist chairman of a department in another museum suggests that a qualified visiting student prepare the first thorough descriptive cat-

⁶ Such plans for removing the anthropological collections are in various stages of completion at least in the British Museum and the Horniman Museum in London, the Peabody Museum at Harvard, and the U. S. National Museum. The Museum of the American Indian in New York has operated with such a separation for many years.

ologue of one of the most important collections under his care, and then refuses to allow the student to complete the catalogue by including those pieces in the collection which have been solidly built into modern exhibits on the grounds that it is too much trouble to remove them for study. As one of the small group of research users of ethnographic collections, my own experiences on study visits to some 15 of the 20 or so largest and most important general ethnographic collections in the world are significant. Two of these museums flatly refuse to allow serious researchers to photograph their specimens; most have no special facilities for visitors to use for photography, and many have not even any space where a visitor can arrange items to photograph even though he has brought all his own equipment; none, in my experience, has convenient locations for studying the specimens in or immediately adjoining all storage areas; most find it difficult—and some impossible—to remove exhibited items for study (but all try to put their most important specimens on exhibit, often with catalogue numbers hidden); usually some 10 to 20 percent of the specimens a visitor selects for study from the catalogue descriptions cannot be located (and in a recent visit to a national museum of anthropology in Europe, 83 percent of the specimens I identified in the working catalogue could not be found); always a visitor cannot help but feel that he is imposing on the inadequate professional and supporting staff—a visitor interested in serious research on the collections is so unusual that he is bound to disrupt the museum routines. The usual state of the storage and the catalogues and other records has to be seen to be believed; one seriously wonders whether present collections will survive any better than have the pitiful remnants of 17th and 18th century collections (cf. Washburn 1968).

But let me switch hats to my role as curator. An ethnologist with curatorial responsibilities, while recognizing these disgraceful conditions, must also consider the allocation of his own time and energies. What should be done to improve and preserve the collections is obvious; but the results of his work would be seen and appreciated by a very small proportion of his colleagues, and given the severe limitations in funds, personnel, and space all museums suffer from, it would be a dif-

ficult struggle to get even a small part of the help so obviously needed to do a proper job. The criteria by which his professional standing is evaluated both by his anthropological peers and by the museum authorities who pay and promote him have almost nothing to do with the state of the collections under his care. Curators with any ambition and regard for their own potentialities quickly and repeatedly decide to devote themselves to the research and publication which will advance anthropology (and their own careers) right now rather than in some distant future. Such ethnologists are "square pegs in round holes" or "in the wrong pew"—to quote the common opinion of museum archeologists and of the few really good and productive museum ethnologists who do focus their research on the collections under their care. But there are nowhere near enough good round pegs to fill the holes in museums. The alternative to supporting square pegs is to hire museum ethnologists who are not in the mainstream of ethnology, which further degrades the attractiveness of museums for active anthropologists of whatever specialty. There are a few such people now in museums; among them are some of the better curators, but also some of the worst: lacking peers, they are less constrained by outside judgments of their actions and easily fall into autocracy, isolation, high-handed treatment of research visitors, and disposal of scientifically vital collections through sale or exchange to individual collectors and dealers and to other (especially art) museums. The administrative structure of many independent and some university museums only supports these tendencies, for boards of directors and boards of supervisors tend to consist of financiers, businessmen, politicians, and others who are interested in the financial status of the organization and in its reception by the general public, but who cannot and do not exercise any informed scientific supervision over a director gone berserk.

What can be done? It is a problem for museum anthropology as a whole, not just for museum ethnology. Although collections are central to the research of archeologists and some physical anthropologists, but only to a very small minority of ethnologists, the answer is not to separate out the archeologists and physical anthropologists and their collections. Not only would

this be disastrous for museum ethnology, but it would be deleterious for museum archeology and physical anthropology, for anthropology is fundamentally a single field and few anthropologically-oriented archeologists and physical anthropologists would stay in fragmented departments where they would be peripheral to the centers of unified anthropological research and teaching.

The best hope is for the increase of the quantity, quality, and prestige of ethnological research based on museum collections. Broad justifications for the importance of ethnological research on material culture (which in turn will require attention to artifacts in museums) are not difficult to formulate:

1. Man is preeminently the tool-using animal, so that an understanding of his physical and cultural evolution and his relation to the non-human environment requires knowledge of his adaptive use of materials in its full cultural variety in historic as well as prehistoric times.

2. Ethnology is not fulfilling its mandate when it neglects material culture in favor of social and mental culture. In many respects the material basis clearly underlies, limits, and determines other aspects of human social life. It is particularly surprising that the technological aspects of our own and other cultures are not more studied by anthropologist members of a society so dominated and harassed by technological advances and technological problems. If anthropologists do not fill this gap, it will be filled by others who lack some of the special advantages of an anthropological training and outlook, in particular the emphasis on functionalism which leads to studies of the integration of artifacts with non-material aspects of culture.⁷

3. Artifacts, and especially dated artifacts in museum collections, provide essential evidence for the history of cultures. Ethnological artifacts are an important link between the societies whose remains are recovered in the more recent parts of archeological sequences, and their historical successors. Furthermore, archeologists depend heavily on ethnological analogies

⁷ The last two points were emphasized for me in conversations respectively with P. J. C. Dark and J. C. Ewers.

for understanding the functions and contexts of the fragmentary artifacts on which they must base their paleo-ethnography and prehistoriography. For ethnohistorians museum collections are crucial historical documents whose potentials are only beginning to be appreciated (cf. Fenton 1967).

4. In non-literate societies only artifacts provide models and evidence of the past apart from those "stored in human memory" (and subject to the vagaries of human memory); this surely has important consequences for the members of those societies (Goody and Watt 1968: 29), as it certainly does for the evidential value of artifacts for both contemporary and subsequent outside observers. Both informants' and recorders' biases are less significant here than with either oral or written testimony. The artifacts stored in museums provide a vast body of quite direct cultural evidence which should be analyzed and re-analyzed.

But general statements such as these on the importance of material objects for human life, and on how unjustifiably museum collections of them are being neglected, are not going to convince students nor shift the research interests of established professionals. When the statements come from a museum anthropologist they sound like petty and self-serving complaints which are easily taken as attempts to denigrate the real accomplishments and importance of other more active lines of current research. What causes shifts in research emphases is the discovery of quite specific problems and methods that are attractive because they promise advances clearly related to other important interests of the discipline. If such problems and methods can be worked out from studying museum collections, this in turn will raise the prestige of more pedestrian research done on the same media. Attention should therefore be devoted not just to urging more research on artifacts, but to improving the methods of research on museum collections and particularly to adapting interesting developments from other, more prestigious and more advanced fields. Such applications are more likely to be made by the "square pegs" with other interests whose employment puts them into proximity to the collections, than they are by "round pegs" attracted to museums by the traditional kinds of research on ethnological collections.

In fact, there are already indications from several different directions of a revivification of ethnological research on material culture. While this is not the place to go into details, an enumeration of some of these tendencies (or potential tendencies) helps to justify optimism about the future of anthropological museum collections. From archeology may be mentioned the application of attribute analysis to ethnographic specimens as well as archeological ones, and the increasing importance of detailed and specific ethnographic analogies in archeological interpretations. From other interests of ethnology (and linguistics) come: recognition of the advantages of concrete artifacts as the basis for componential analysis and for other applications of *etic/emic* or *ethnoscience* methods, generative analysis, semiology, and other semantic approaches; the involvement of art and artifacts in studies of symbolic classification; an increased interest in field studies of non-Western art, from various points of view (partly influenced by lessening ethnocentrism in Western art appreciation and art history); the use of specimens, especially dated ones, as historical documents on both non-literate and literate cultures; and the recognition of the utility of artifacts in museum collections for the critical assessment of ethnographic illustrations both as ethnological documents and as part of the history of Western art. These trends may be summed up as an increasing attention to classification, semantics, and symbolism—in general, the rise of a variety of structuralist methods—and in diachronic studies more inclusive definition of the kinds of “documents” which are relevant.

It is not only developments in anthropological theory and method that encourage confidence in the wider recognition of ethnological museum collections as the important resources they indeed are. In France, at least, there is already an obvious increase in student interest in material culture and museum collections: one of the demands of the protesting students of May and June 1968 was for access to museum collections and introduction to their study (Hélène Balfet, pers. communic., 15 Feb. 1969). The combination of the increasing difficulty of access to foreign areas for fieldwork, the very rapid Westernization of technology everywhere, and the explosive increase in

the number of anthropologists who must publish or perish, will almost certainly also lead to more research on ethnological museum collections.

Meanwhile there are several organizational modifications which can improve museums as research environments for anthropologists and help to save their collections for the time when they will be vital for anthropology.

Museum specimens are unique cultural and historical documents; we must find out what and where this evidence is. There are about 200,000 ethnological specimens in the U. S. National Museum, somewhat over one and one-half million in all United States museums, and perhaps four and one-half million in all museums of the world.⁸ A pilot study at the University of Oklahoma has developed procedures for preparing an inventory of all of these, which would incorporate most of the errors in existing museum catalogues (for example, the U. S. National Museum must have several hundred, perhaps several thousand, specimens catalogued as "locality unknown, probably North America" or some equivalent of this) but would provide the basis for later correction and amplification. This study indicates that it would require about 140 man-years to prepare an "index ethnographicum" or "union catalogue" for the United States alone, at a cost of approximately 50 cents per specimen for preparing and key-punching the inventory sheets—any computer operations will add to this cost figure (Ricciardelli 1967b, 1967c). Somewhat over half the specimens in the United States are in the five largest museums, which should surely be left to do their own indexing; they have or can get the needed skilled staff, and this will make partial completion of the project less than half as expensive and nearly as useful as full completion, for anyone will know that he must search these major museums for relevant specimens whereas without an inventory he will miss most of the others which are widely scattered in smaller museums. As soon as possible these large museums should modify their present cataloguing systems to make

⁸ These figures are based, respectively, on (1) a careful count of a stratified sample of the specimens described in the USNM catalogue cards, conducted by the author and Gordon D. Gibson in 1965 and 1966; (2) the North American estimate made by Ricciardelli (1967a) from several lines of evidence carefully considered; (3) my own extrapolation from the latter, which is merely an informed guess.

them compatible with the projected continent-wide computerized index, so that future accessions can be fed into the system immediately, before the index is extended backward to include the older materials. Similar schemes are being considered at least in the United Kingdom and France; there is reason to hope that all will be compatible. As Jean Cuisenier has pointed out (pers. communic., 30 Dec. 1968), the use of computers is spreading so rapidly that the modern student generation takes them for granted; our museum collections are in danger of becoming useless if young scholars are not able to use computers to retrieve information on them.

Most research on ethnological collections depends heavily on the minority of specimens which have some documentation, at least dating, and the older collections of this sort are particularly valuable. So a committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and J. C. Ewers with the Committee on Anthropological Research in Museums of the American Anthropological Association are both considering another type of inventory to compile location lists for older dated specimens without waiting for these to appear in the full inventories of all museum ethnological holdings.

The problem of the conflict between curatorial and research duties is perhaps even more acute in ethnology than in other museum fields, because of the wider gap between the usual research interests of present and prospective curators and their housekeeping responsibilities. Complete separation of research and curatorial staff is risky: in many if not most museums the collections and the necessity for exhibiting and caring for them provide the front which justifies the museum budget; if it is made to appear that research and curation are completely distinct, research becomes more vulnerable to budget cuts; but it is well known from much experience that collections without associated research staff cannot long survive. On the other hand, giving the research staff full curatorial duties has the untoward consequences for both the collections and the research which we have already outlined. One solution is to develop further the practice already existing in most large museums, where the scientific staff supervises a "supporting staff," paid less and with lower academic credentials, which does most

of the actual curatorial labor. But it is difficult to locate, train, and keep adequately skilled people for such clearly second-class jobs. The status and responsibilities of these positions could be raised by lifting the career ceiling on them and assigning to their upper ranks some such title as "Curator of Collections," with truly commensurate responsibilities. A few museums already do this, and the practice should be extended. We need the museum equivalent of Librarians and Archivists. Professionalization of this sort does carry the dangers that Washburn (1967) has pointed out. The scientific staff—subject-matter specialists—must maintain scientific guidance over collections policy, and museum tables of organization should be planned with this in mind. It may be anachronistic in this society, but an effort must be made to emphasize apprenticeship training rather than preparation in some academic museology. Certainly the knowledge and experience needed to curate museum collections is more specialized, more different as between the collections of different sciences, than is the case for collections of books or manuscripts. An anthropological museologist, an entomological museologist, and an art-gallery museologist could not come from a similar background of academic and practical experience.

Finally, some important modifications of the museum concept are needed at least by anthropology. For one thing, anthropology does not belong in a natural history museum. In fact, the United States is behind the rest of the world in this respect: except in North America, Australia, and New Zealand, nearly all important anthropological collections are either housed in independent museums of anthropology or of man, or they are joined with collections of history, folklore, prehistory, and Classical archeology, while natural history collections are separately housed (Frese 1960: 15–32). A justification for the separation which is of particular force for the modern world is that given by the Director of the National Museum of Anthropology of Mexico in describing its origins in 1910: "Until that year the museum had remained one of "Natural History." But at that time all the natural history collections were removed to another museum thus abandoning, I hope forever, the placing of indigenous cultures in the same building as animals, which gives visi-

tors inaccurate ideas about native peoples and their cultures" (Bernal 1966: 132). Another reason for removing anthropology from natural history museums is the quite different character of the collections, which are more like those of history and art in their unique qualities as historical documents and in the problems of acquisition and protection, and which are related to ongoing research in quite a different manner. Some anthropologists (especially some archeologists) now in natural history museums point to the advantages of a close association with the natural scientists with whom they find many areas of scientific collaboration, especially with the rise of an ecological approach to human cultures. But there are equally strong reasons, from some other areas of anthropological interest, for urging the benefits of a closer association with the historians, art historians, and technologists who are found in other kinds of museums. Another advantage of a separate Museum of Anthropology or Museum of Man is that it is easier to broaden its mandate for collecting and curating so that it will include all the sorts of physical objects on which anthropological research is based. The Musée de l'Homme and the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires in Paris, and the Department of Anthropology and the Center for the Study of Man (now planning a new Museum of Man) of the Smithsonian, and probably a few other museums, already define their museum function as essentially that of archiving: the usual museum collections of artifacts and skeletal materials, and in addition still and cinema photographs, drawings and paintings, sound recordings, anthropological manuscripts, and books. Many of these additional materials are at least as crucial for future research as are specimens and yet are not being systematically archived by any other institutions; the physical and administrative museum structure is more suitable for this task than is that of any university department.

With new museums comes the rare opportunity for a major advance in anthropological exhibit techniques. Any museum anthropologist will recognize the advances associated with the inauguration, in order, of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, the Natural History Building of the U. S. National Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, the Musée de

l'Homme, and lastly, the Milwaukee Public Museum in 1963–71 and, in 1964, the new building of the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. It is past time for a radical new approach. Borhegyi has recently well described the problem:

Through [museum] exhibits, million of people can be exposed to the inherent dangers of nationalism, ethnocentrism, and racial and religious prejudices. Yet museum exhibits in general, and natural history museums in particular, instead of stirring the imagination of visitors, tend to perpetuate the visitors' stereotypes of "savages" and "quaint primitive" cultures. The anthropology exhibits keep on cultivating the romanticism of the visitor by showing exotic "tribal" peoples in "peculiar" attires, amidst prettily staged sentimental settings, or appeal to his sense of the macabre by the inevitable showing of mummies, skeletons, and shrunken heads. . . . Museum anthropologists continue to be primarily object and tribal rather than subject or concept oriented in their exhibits, and most of them rightfully deserve the title of "keepers" . . . rather than "doers." (Borhegyi 1969)

Perhaps three new approaches to exhibits would be particularly effective in a new Museum of Anthropology:

1. Exhibits should catch up with the principles of modern anthropology, rather than continuing simply to illustrate the "culture areas" elaborated for museum exhibits over 60 years ago. In particular the relevance of anthropological knowledge to some of the difficulties of the modern world should be stressed.

2. Some exhibits, perhaps changing ones, should illustrate current research, especially that being conducted by anthropologists on the museum staff.

3. Anthropology, as the only social science well established in museums, seems the ideal field to study the educational effectiveness of various exhibit techniques, to conduct research on visitor reactions. I am by no means an expert on the topic, but I have the impression that this is an underdeveloped research area. The rapid specialization and technological improvement of exhibit techniques seems to have occurred without reference to studies of what visitors actually prefer or bene-

fit from (and these last may not be the same). A recent wide-ranging bibliography of museum visitor surveys lists only 124 titles, published and semi-published, nearly all of them very brief papers, on studies in all sorts of museums between 1897 and 1966, and very few of these report anything approaching sophisticated controlled experiments (Borhegyi and Hanson 1968a; cf. Washburn 1961; Borhegyi and Hanson 1968b).

Although anthropological museum exhibits certainly need improvement, there is a real danger that attention to exhibits will intrude on the time and support for curators' research. Certainly no exhibit program should be conducted without both the technicians to do the actual work, and funds to hire outside experts on a short-term basis to help plan the scientific aspects of the exhibits. Down the exhibits road lie the museums feared by research-oriented curators, where emphasis on exhibits, popular education, visitor attendance, advertising, and income-producing museum shops erodes support for scientific research, drives scholars off the staff, and runs a grave risk of destroying the collections and turning the museum into a mere entertaining sideshow.

Crompton has recently urged that "it is time . . . that we recognized that the functions of maintaining collections, designing exhibitions and running sophisticated research programs cannot be carried out by a single person. It must also be recognized that successful scientific research is usually coupled with stimulation provided either by fellow workers or students or teaching or all three. Unless natural history museums are prepared to recognize this, it will not be possible for them to create strong scientific programs." He also outlines the manner in which a successful university museum may avoid many of the problems of ensuring active research by its curators, by integrating the museum administratively with the teaching departments (in reality, subordinating the museum to the departments) (Crompton 1968). A non-university museum must invent the equivalent of teaching departments. Opportunities must be provided for curators to take leave to teach in universities, and fellowships and facilities must be offered to attract students and university faculty members to museums—and not only for research and teaching related to the museum collec-

tions. Museums have some advantages over universities as bases for anthropological research; among these is the freedom from the academic schedule which allows extended fieldwork at any time of the year. Particularly in ethnology it is customary for the most intensive and important fieldwork to be done early in the scholar's career, often just before he receives his Ph.D. In the usual situation he must then postpone publishing the full results; by the time his teaching duties become less time-consuming and he can get leave from his university, he has family and other responsibilities which prevent another lengthy period of isolation for fieldwork. The same is true, to a somewhat lesser extent, for the other sub-fields of anthropology. It is becoming ever more clear that advances in ethnology depend on advances in ethnography; yet ethnography suffers from the structure of academic careers. Museum-based research, both fieldwork and publication, for younger anthropologists is a solution. If after a few years they move to university teaching positions, the museum and the science have gained by supporting them during their most productive research years, and the university has gained by acquiring teachers who are already experienced and productive research workers.

As Fenton (1960) has suggested, a redefinition of anthropological museums in terms of the Alexandrian museum as a community of scholars and students would be a large step forward. Collections will be increasingly important, and there are serious problems in preserving them and in taking advantage of the short time remaining in which we will be able to use fieldwork to improve our understanding of existing museum specimens and to acquire the new and properly documented collections which we owe to our successors. But the new Museums of Man must be research organizations, with the collections of artifacts and other documents under the care of Curators of Collections, supervised by the scientists who are supported to do good anthropology whether or not this is directly related to the collections. In such an environment we can be quite sure that the collections will survive, that research on them will increase, and that museums can significantly advance anthropology as a whole.

Anthropology does indeed need museums. But it needs the

Very Model of a Modern Anthropology Museum, not an equivocal and petrified institution which reminds one of a bordello.⁹

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⁹I am indebted to many colleagues for comments and criticisms which helped me to improve an earlier draft of this paper. I hope the 15 or so who may see that they influenced me—sometimes surely insufficiently—will forgive me for not listing their names.

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